

RODNEY E. SLATER  
UNITED STATES  
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

Rodney E. Slater was named Secretary of Transportation on February 14, 1997. He is the 13th Secretary in the 30-year history of the Department, and only the third Arkansan in American history to ever hold a position in the President's Cabinet.

President Clinton said in nominating Slater: "he has built bridges both of steel and of goodwill to bring people closer together." As Secretary, Slater is working to build the President's bridge to the 21st century as well as the nation's airports, highways, railroads, mass transit, and maritime resources. The Department, which has 100,000 employees and a budget of more than \$40 billion, also includes the United States Coast Guard.

As Secretary, Slater likes to say: "I believe that transportation is about more than concrete, asphalt, and steel. It is truly about people and providing them the opportunity to be successful and responsible individuals."

Under his leadership, the Department developed a strategic plan that Congress rated the best among all federal agencies. He also worked with Congress to increase investments in infrastructure by 12 percent in fiscal 1998, to the highest levels of any Secretary in history.

In his first year, the Department helped 600 million people fly; had 100 miles of transit lines under construction, the most since Woodrow Wilson was President; repaired thousands of America's bridges, putting them in the best condition they have been in years; acted aggressively to improve the safety of our rail system and averted a strike by Amtrak; initiated a program to get all Americans to buckle seat belts; saved more than 5,000 lives at sea, and stopped more drugs from entering our borders than ever before; signed 14 agreements with other nations to open their skies to American airlines; and focused the Department's attention on increasing trade with Africa.

Secretary Slater also is working to ensure former welfare recipients have public transportation to get to their new jobs; and he launched the Garrett A. Morgan Technology and Transportation Futures Program, aimed at attracting a million youth into transportation careers, and mentoring and tutoring them to make sure they have needed skills.

Before becoming Secretary, Slater was Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration, creating the 160,000-mile National Highway System, upsizing highway investment by 20 percent, while downsizing the staff by 10 percent -proving government can work more efficiently and still make investments to provide economic opportunity for all Americans. He also developed an innovative financing program that is allowing hundreds of transportation projects to be built two to three years sooner, on average, at no extra cost to the federal taxpayer.

From 1987 to 1992, he was a member of the Arkansas State Highway Commission, serving as its chairman in 1992. He held several other positions in Arkansas, including Director of Governmental Relations at Arkansas State University; Executive Assistant for Economic and Community Programs for then-Governor Bill Clinton; the Governor's Special Assistant for Community and Minority Affairs; and Assistant Attorney General-Litigation Division of the Arkansas State Attorney General's Office. He also was liaison for the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission.

He was born on February 23, 1955, and grew up in Marianna, Arkansas, one of the poorest areas in America. His first job was at age six, when he worked in a cotton field with his mother to earn money to buy his first vehicle--a bicycle. Slater graduated from Eastern Michigan University and earned a law degree at the University of Arkansas. At Eastern Michigan, he was captain of the football team and a member of the school's National Championship Forensics

team. Eastern Michigan University presented him its Black Alumni Achievement Award in 1994 and an honorary doctorate degree in 1996.

He has received numerous additional honors in recent years, including, in 1999, an Honorary Doctorate from Howard University, the Albert Schweitzer Leadership Award from the Hugh O'Brian Leadership Foundation, the Lamplighter Award for Public Service from The Black Leadership Forum and the "Trailblazer Award" from Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. In 1998 he received the George Collins Award for community service from The Congressional Black Caucus; Ebony named him one of the 100 Most Influential Black Americans; The National Bar Association gave him its coveted President's Award and The Arkansas Times named him "Arkansas Hero." In 1997, The Arkansas Press Association gave him its Headliner of the Year Award; he also was one of the Arkansas Jaycees' Ten Outstanding Young Arkansans. Also in 1997, he received the Arkansas Public Transportation Award and the W. Harold Flowers Law Society Lawyer-Citizen Award.

Secretary Slater and his wife, Cassandra Wilkins, have a daughter, Bridgette Josette.

February 2000